

A Look Around Lakota



WE are Lak@ta.

On the heels of a school year marked by especially unique challenges and a resounding attitude of perseverance by our students, staff and parents, **WE are ready to get back to the future** - where collaboration is at the center of everything we do. The lessons wrapped up in the last year taught us a lot, but one thing is for sure...

WE are Better Together!



Welcome back!
I can't think of a year
when we have been
more excited to welcome
our students and staff
back into our buildings.

This past school year showed how resilient WE are. We are so grateful for the support of our families and our community. Lakota is one of very few districts in Ohio - and one of the largest - who were able to hold school in person for the entire year, all while offering a Virtual Learning Option that was created and taught by our teachers.

As we prepare to open our doors and begin the 2021-2022 school year, the safety of our students and staff is always our top priority. Along with following guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

and the Ohio Department of Health, we have consulted with experts from UC Health Hospital and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center to determine COVID-related safety protocols for the school year.

As of the printing of this mailer, masks and facial coverings will be optional for all staff and students (except on buses) and we will return to pre-pandemic seating and collaboration spaces. We also strongly encourage staff, students and visitors who are not vaccinated to wear a mask while inside our schools. We encourage those who are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccination to consider getting it.

Our priorities for the school year hold true to our mission statement: Everything WE do is designed to provide a future-ready, student-centered learning experience for every single child. This begins with personalized learning, something at which our teachers

FROM THE LAKOTA BOARD OF EDUCATION | Q: How did the past year stre



Kelley Casper, President

A: "This past year has shown us the resiliency of our staff and students and the ability of both to pivot and adapt to ever-changing circumstances. We found different ways to focus on building relationships that we can carry into future years.

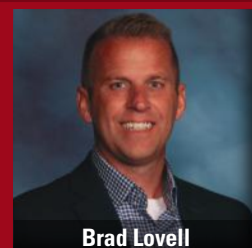
Technology became more important than ever as we realized many meetings can be held virtually. This will save time and allow teachers and administrators to remain in their buildings while still collaborating with their peers."



Michael Pearl, VP

A: "The good thing about adversity is that it reveals true character! The past year strengthened us and proved that we are better together.

We found that when push comes to shove, we all come together as a school community to do what's best for students, teachers, administrators and the community at large. The adversity we faced proved our resilience."



Brad Lovell

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BETTER TOGETHER

are Lakota

excel. It continues through being future ready and fiscally responsible. Finally, WE are in this together in order to best support our students and prepare them for a successful future once they leave our hallways.

After having to press pause on the way we do things because of COVID restrictions, we are excited to get "back to the future." To share just a few new programs with you, we will introduce an expanded social-emotional curriculum at the K-6 level and a dedicated academic support period for our secondary students. Our elementary students in grades

three through five will join the "WE are Empowered" movement with access to their own Chromebooks during the day. Now, all students in grades three through 12 will be able to use the devices to enhance their learning through targeted instruction.

I hope that you enjoy the last days of summer break. WE can't wait to see our kids back in school very soon. After all, WE are better together.

Matthew J. Miller

MATTHEW J. MILLER
Superintendent/CEO

Stay up-to-date on all COVID-related safety procedures and other back-to-school information on our back-to-school hub: lakotaonline.com/backtoschool



Jenni L. Logan
Treasurer/CFO

Being fiscally responsible with our taxpayers' dollars is always my top priority as treasurer of Lakota Local Schools.

Coming into the past school year, we tightened our spending even more than we typically would as we anticipated significant spending cuts to public education.

Although the State cuts were not as high as we expected, we also incurred many new expenses related to COVID. From additional cleaning supplies and hand sanitizer throughout our buildings, to purchasing school supplies for our students in order to help our families who were struggling financially because of the pandemic, to the creation of our own virtual learning curriculum, these all contributed to much higher expenses than normal. Assistance from the federal government through the Corona

FROM THE TREASURER

Relief Fund (CRF) and Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) dollars helped to offset some of these costs. In fact, we were able to end our Fiscal Year 21 with a spending surplus. Because of this, following policy, we had the opportunity to increase our Rainy Day fund by an additional \$2.1 million.

At the end of the 2020-2021 school year, we had already spent more than \$3.7 million in aid through ESSER I and II, CRF and the BroadbandOhio Connectivity Grant. As we move forward into this new school year, and look beyond to 2024, we are fortunate to have additional assistance from the federal government through ESSER II and III. These funds will assist us in personalizing education, including the expansion of our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) work, a prevention-focused and responsive framework for addressing students' needs, and introducing school-based one-to-one access to technology in grades three through five.

As we introduce these programs, fiscal sustainability continues to be our long-term goal. We understand the importance of living within our means and will continue to do so.

Jenni L. Logan

JENNI L. LOGAN
Treasurer/CFO

lengthen our school community and prepare us to move forward together?

A: "The past year showed us the power of 'together.' As WE collectively faced challenges in how we teach, learn and engage, we realized that we are stronger as a community.

As we look forward, WE know that when challenges arise, we have the power to come together to make bold and decisive decisions. Ultimately, the challenges that we faced – along with the needed innovation to the educational experience – will result in new opportunities for our students."



Lynda O'Connor

A: "The pandemic forced Lakota into rethinking schools and learning for all students. Out of challenge came opportunity. For example, to our teachers' credit, they adapted to new ways of instructional delivery, and our custodians implemented new procedures to ensure health and safety.

The past year demonstrated the relevance of all internal stakeholders. From support staff to teachers to administrators to the Board – everyone worked together to make this past year happen for students."



Julie Shaffer

A: "The past year allowed us to accomplish objectives we did not know were possible, to stretch resources in new ways, and once again debunk the stereotype that education cannot pivot on a dime.

Our entire organization proved there is very little they will not do to put students first, and that we can accomplish great things when the entire community comes together for a common objective – our students."

Looking Back: The Year in Review

Considering the 2020-2021 school year was defined, in part, by physical distancing, **in many ways the whole experience brought Lakota students, staff and families together.**

Even with masks and at least three feet or a screen between them at all times, teachers and staff discovered unique ways to continue providing the personalized education that Lakota students and families have come to expect.

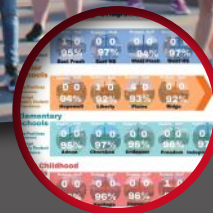
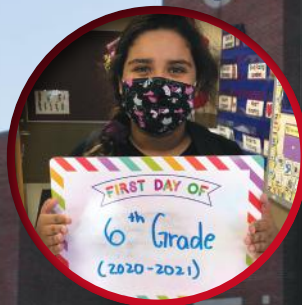
A staggered start gave teachers more time to build a solid foundation with their students. Many classrooms turned to more outdoor learning spaces, where the experience doubled as a mask break and new options for learning and exploring. Creative solutions like air high fives, games allowing for social distancing and even art projects encouraging self-expression in spite of masks helped students and staff connect. Options like daily lunch gatherings, virtual celebrations and family read-alouds, for example, helped virtual learners stay connected to one another.

For the first half of the year, quarantines among both students and staff were a major line of defense against the spread of COVID-19 and became a regular occurrence in our community and our schools. Yet staff came together and found ways to overcome absences and keep students learning even while in quarantine. Lakota joined eight other districts across the state to participate in a study that proved the effectiveness of masks in a school setting to prevent spread and ultimately loosened quarantine requirements for all Ohio schools.

Before the school year started, Lakota began the massive undertaking to develop a unique fully-online K-12 education option for families, better known as its Virtual Learning Option (VLO). Some of Lakota's best teachers worked with the curriculum team to design online materials for all K-6 core courses and 30 model courses for grades 7-12. The process used district resources and Lakota's curriculum for most classes instead of the popular alternative of a third party software. In many instances, the tools and resources developed for virtual learning proved useful for in-person learning too, allowing content to benefit students across building lines.

All year long, Lakota's schools and the district reinvented events like open houses, coffee chats, fundraisers and the district's "State of the Schools" to continue virtually. Although different, they brought people together and kept them engaged in our schools.

All of this made Lakota one of very few districts statewide to maintain in-person learning for the entire school year. More importantly, it set a tone of perseverance and innovation that will carry us into the future.



June 26, 2020
Virtual Learning Option (VLO) launches
VLO served over 4,000 students during first semester.

July 31, 2020
Board approves Plan A
Plan allowed for full-time, in-person option with added safety precautions.

September 3, 2020
Meal program for VLO students kicks off
Lakota distributed nearly 58,000 meals to VLO students last year.

September 12, 2020
All students eligible for USDA free meal waiver

June 30, 2020
"WE are Prepared" ABC plan announced
Lakota's mask requirement preceded the state mandate.

August 17, 2020
School year begins
Staggered start eases students and staff into new procedures.

September 8, 2020
COVID-19 dashboard launches





Looking Back: A Focus on Finance

WE are Fiscally Responsible.

This statement is one of the four pillars of Lakota's strategic plan because making sound financial decisions is a top priority throughout the district. This was especially important last year as we reopened our schools for in-person learning while simultaneously offering a Lakota-created Virtual Learning Option.

Protecting our taxpayers' investment in our schools is always a top priority for us. Balancing this while responding to the challenges of meeting the needs of our students during this pandemic has never been more challenging. Fiscal

year 2021 included a second consecutive year of state funding cuts, but also included increased federal funding. This short-term injection of federal dollars to our school district has helped us further protect your local tax dollars while focusing on providing a safe multi-layered educational experience for our students. Two thousand twenty-one also provided hope for the future of state funding in Ohio. The fair school funding model will now be the way Ohio funds its schools, which will provide a more reliable, predictable and transparent structure. So, while the pandemic brought us many challenges, we have

also discovered many financial opportunities.

As we prepare to welcome our students back to school, we remain committed to being good stewards of our taxpayers' dollars because **WE are Fiscally Responsible.**

Financial Assistance:

The financial assistance Lakota received helped offset the additional expenses the district incurred due to COVID-19. By the end of FY21, the district had already spent \$3.7 million, which included funding from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) I and II, the Corona Relief Fund and the BroadbandOhio Connectivity grant.

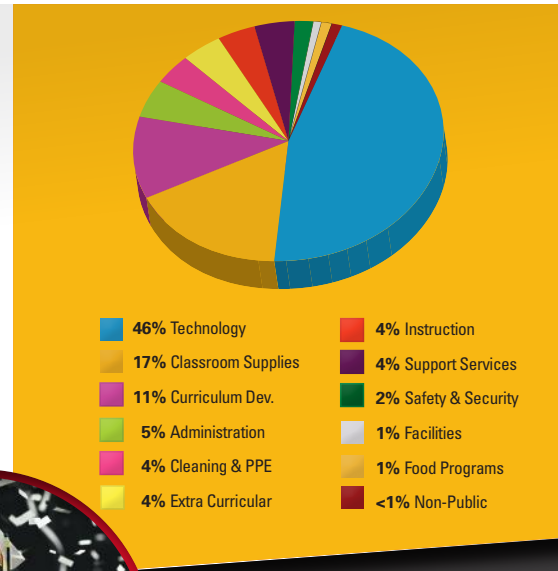
While the district is still finalizing how the remaining ESSER funds will be used, part of the money will support the expansion of "WE are Empowered" one-to-one devices to include third- through fifth-graders, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) throughout the district, implementing the district's recovery plan for learning loss and the purchase of school supply kits for students in grades K-8.

COVID-19 Expenses:

The impact of COVID-19 on district expenses for FY21 touched multiple departments. The short-term federal dollars available to Lakota helped offset these expenses. The district was able to end the year in a better financial position than was initially forecasted.

COVID-related expenses impacted many departments throughout the district. From the creation of our Virtual Learning Option curriculum to providing meals for VLO students, from cleaning and PPE to technology and student support, the additional needs were vast. Many of these expenses will continue in the future. However, knowing we have federal assistance to partner with us locally to meet these needs is comforting. The ESSER dollars will allow us to help offset new costs that have come our way as well as supplant existing costs that create safe learning environments for students, address learning loss caused by the pandemic and support our students' mental health.

GRANT DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT AWARDED	AMOUNT SPENT
Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF)	795,414.86	\$795,414.86
BroadbandOhio Connectivity Grant	144,597.23	144,597.23
ESSER I	1,368,379.08	1,244,308.77
ESSER II	5,324,803.02	1,585,664.43
ESSER III	11,958,751.18	—
TOTAL	\$19,591,945.37	\$3,769,985.29



January 4-15, 2021
Remote learning and staggered start following return from winter break

February 3, 2021
Lakota staff offered first dose of COVID-19 vaccination

May 19-21, 2021
East and West hold in-person graduations

November 16, 2020
Lakota begins state study reviewing school quarantines
One of eight districts statewide selected to participate.

January 6, 2021
Findings of state study on school quarantines lifts mandates for close contacts wearing a mask

March 11, 2021
Continuation of VLO in 2021-2022 announced

May 20, 2021
Last Day of School
Lakota one of few districts statewide to be in-person all year.

Looking Ahead

Last year's adaptations may have been non-traditional, but some of them proved effective and will have a place in Lakota's future. **Here's a snapshot of what's on the horizon during the upcoming school year.**

Virtual Learning Option (VLO)

Last spring, Lakota announced the continuation of its VLO, which will welcome nearly 350 students this fall. Teachers continue to build on the fully-online learning modules developed by Lakota staff. Now operating as its own Lakota school, VLO offers students access to the same supports as in-person learners, including counseling services and community building opportunities.

Visit lakotaonline.com/vlo for more information.



"A Peek Behind the Curtain of VLO"

Get an inside look at the inaugural year of VLO from participating students and teachers.



ECS/Elementary



Secondary

what's trending @LakotaDistrict

Back-To-School Hub

Get all your back-to-school questions answered and prepare for the year ahead. Find supply lists, bus route information, open house dates and much, much more at lakotaonline.com/backtoschool. #WEareBetterTogether



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Coming Soon: New Website

Watch for a new Lakota website to launch later this school year. Parent, staff and student input will be key to developing the new design. #WEareLakota



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Update Your Contact Info to Stay Informed

Visit Lakota's new "Back-to-School Gateway" to review and verify emergency medical information, contact information and other annual updates electronically. The Gateway will also update Home Access Center, our primary source of contact information for all school-to-home communications as Lakota transitions to another mass notification provider. #WEareConnected

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Gifted Education

Beginning next school year, changes to the structure of Lakota's elementary gifted services will result in more services for more students. A professional development plan implemented by a modified team of gifted intervention specialists (GISs) will shift gifted education for math to the traditional classroom, while adding a new opportunity for gifted instruction in English Language Arts. The number of students served is expected to more than triple under the new structure.



Scan to watch a video summarizing the remodeled gifted program.

Social & Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) will join the daily rotation of specials this year for grades kindergarten through six. Formerly the health special, SEL combines the health curriculum with social and emotional learning standards like mindfulness, self-regulation and coping skills. Students will receive dedicated SEL instruction 30 times throughout the year, as compared to seven times under its previous format. In grades 7-12, SEL will be infused into students' advisory periods and the new academic support times.

1:1 Technology

Lakota's "WE are Empowered" program continues to grow with one-to-one access to learning devices expanding to all students in grades three through five. The expansion extends access to a district-owned Chromebook during the school day to all elementary-aged students. Similar to sixth-graders, students will leave their devices at school at the end of the day.



Secondary Schedule Changes

New for the 2021-2022 school year is the addition of an academic support period for all students in grades 7-12, an idea introduced through student-teacher collaboration. Part of the district's work to reimagine the secondary student experience, this daily time offers additional academic support during the school day from a content-specific teacher.



Scan to watch a video summarizing the schedule change for grades 7-12.

Looking Forward: A Focus on Finance

Our community has a vested interest in Lakota's finances.

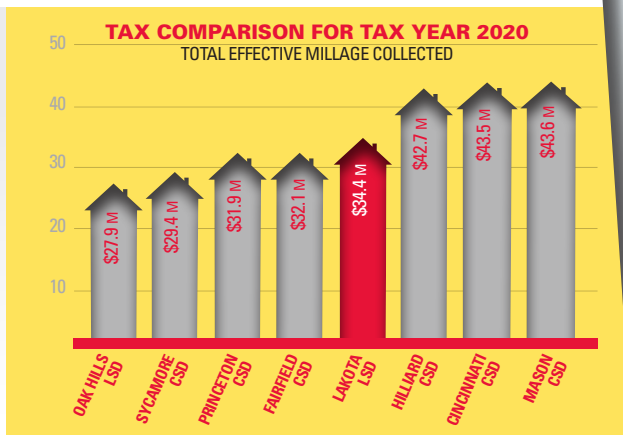
After all, 67% of the district's revenue comes from our community members and local businesses through real estate taxes.

We understand that our community members measure their return on investment in a variety of ways. Besides the exceptional education that our 17,000 students receive, consider these metrics:

Tax Comparison

Knowing how our taxes compare to those of not only our neighbors, but other similar districts across the state, gives our residents a better understanding of their return on investment.

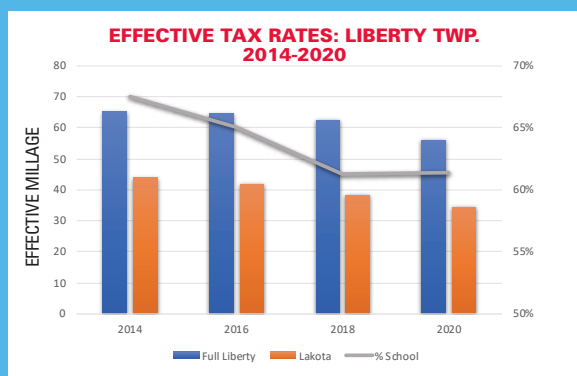
Lakota is right in line with similar districts and continues to be well below the effective millage rate of many other large districts in the state.



Effective Tax Rates

Another way our community can measure its return on investment is to review the effective tax rate history for Lakota Local Schools. It has now been nearly eight years since our community generously approved a levy to support the district. This is not something that district leaders take for granted. We are committed to making decisions that are both student-centered and fiscally responsible.

Since 2013, the district has taken advantage of low interest rates in order to refinance its debt and lower our debt payments by \$4.1 million. In addition to this savings, bond refundings have allowed us to restructure our debt and accelerate our payments so that we will pay off this debt in 2028 instead of 2033. This, along with a steadily growing community and increasing property values for both residents and businesses, has allowed the district to lower the amount we have to collect from our taxpayers in both West Chester and Liberty townships.



Looking Forward

As we look to the start of the new school year, we are certainly in a better position than we had anticipated in March. However, the pandemic has not ended. Our top priorities, as always, are the safety of our students and staff and meeting the needs of each and every one of our 17,000 students in a fiscally responsible way.

District leaders continue to plan how to best apply the remaining ESSER II and III dollars within the parameters set by the federal government. Programs such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and the expansion of 1:1 devices to all elementary students must be planned in a way that will be sustainable in the future.



Finance 101

School finances can be complicated. Scan the QR code to hear how Leo, a second-grader at Lakota, explains it.



New Approach Personalizes Learning

This fall, Lakota will take its #WEarePersonalized goal one step further by using the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework. MTSS uses data and problem solving to align resources to empower teachers to meet the academic and behavioral needs of each student.



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Free Meals Waiver for All Students

The USDA free meals waiver has been extended through the 2021-2022 school year; all students will receive free meals regardless of income. This program is being implemented at no cost to the district. Lakota asks that families who qualify for free and reduced meals continue to fill out the annual application, which is used to calculate government funding the district receives. #WEareLakota



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Facilities for the Future

Be on the lookout for more information about the continuation of Lakota's Master Facilities Planning process after this work was paused during the pandemic. There will be lots of new ways for the community to be involved in planning the future of our facilities. #WEareBuildingOurFuture



WE are Building Our Future

#WEareLakota



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Lakota Schools



@LakotaDistrict



Lakota_District



Lakota Local Schools



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*****ECRWSS*****

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#WEareLakota

We Need You!

At Lakota, we believe the business community is the best facilitator for real world learning and our students' best lens into the possibilities of their future.

From internships and mentorships to speakers in a classroom or a special event, get involved in a way that also fulfills the needs of your business or organization.



Scan to show your
interest in partnering for
real world learning.

Cyber Academy

The Lakota Cyber Academy is a first of its kind high school program that has been designed alongside our industry partners to develop a local pool of talent in the lucrative field of cybersecurity. Thirty-three Lakota Cyber students placed in the top two percent in the National Cyber Scholarship program through CyberStart America, earning a collective \$82,000 in scholarship money.



INCubator@Lakota

Lakota is only the second school district in Ohio – and one of just 125 nationwide – to make the "Shark Tank" concept a class for its juniors and seniors. Called INCubator@Lakota, the entrepreneurial program closed out its inaugural year awarding a collective \$2,500 in seed money to the top three business ideas developed by students alongside their professional mentors.



We had a conversation with four individuals from four different industries about why they choose to partner with Lakota. Here's some of what they each had to say.

"Getting involved with Lakota for an internship for my business has been a game changer."

– **Arin Singer-Bonk**
Delicious Designs Cookies



"Our students are the future workforce; they may be the next pharmacist at Cincinnati Children's. If we can help them along the way and maybe help ourselves, it's a win-win. It's rewarding on both ends."

– **Michelle Hopkins**
Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center



"I wouldn't be where I am today without a mentor who was willing to teach me...giving back is what I'm looking forward to the most."

– **Chimdi Ifeakanwa**
Lakota Cyber Academy Advisory Board



"This is what we do. We all do this. If you're in this community, you need to get on board because if not, we're leaving a kid behind."

– **Randy Wilhelm**
ThinkHorsepower



Watch this video series to see how their conversation unfolded.